

MONTANA TRAVEL & TOURISM BRIEF



Economic Impact

Tourism and recreation is one of Montana's leading industries. In 2007, **10.7 million people** visited Montana **spending \$3.1 billion** during their stay. Over **44,830 jobs** are directly and indirectly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in over **\$1.05 billion in total personal income** for Montana residents. These visitors also contribute **\$235 million in state and local taxes**.

Top Travel & Tourism Priorities for Montana

Federal Lands

National Park Centennial Initiative

- Eighty percent of our non-resident summer travelers, visit Glacier and/or Yellowstone National Park on their trip to Montana. However, chronic underfunding of our national parks has led to deterioration of critical park services and infrastructure. The President, Congress and all Americans must engage in a sustained effort to fully fund and revitalize the park system by the Park Service Centennial in 2016.

Fee Repeal and Expanded Access Act of 2007 (S. 2438)

- Because of the detrimental effect the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) has on the public's access to Montana's federal lands by adopting a "pay-to-play" policy, we do understand the reasons behind repealing the FLREA. Our mountains, forests, national parks, rivers and lakes are the top reasons travelers are choosing Montana. However, we do have concerns about the loss of this revenue for operational purposes and the money generated by the fees should be replaced by a more reliable dedicated funding package for our federal agencies.

Ice Age Floods National Geologic Trail

- Recognizing the importance this trail has to Montana's natural and cultural history, we appreciate the support our congressional delegation has provided by co-sponsoring the bills (S.3213 incorporating S.268 as Sec. 513 and H.R. 450) to establish the Ice Age Floods National Geologic Trail. Once these bills are passed, we hope to also receive congressional support in appropriating money to fund interpretive displays and facilities along the trail, including an interpretive center in Missoula.

International Work & Travel

Travel Promotion Act

- The national travel community's highest legislative priority is passage of the Travel Promotion Act of 2007 (S. 1661 and H.R. 3232), which is currently pending in Congress. These similar bills would create a non-profit Corporation for Travel Promotion as part of public-private partnership to better communicate U.S. travel policies to prospective international travelers, and also promote the U.S. as the world's premier destination. International and specifically Canadians are an important and growing market for Montana, having a program that among other things more clearly explains new U.S. travel rules and procedures will encourage further travel to our state.

International Work & Travel (cont.)

Western Hemisphere Transportation Initiative

- The Western Hemisphere Transportation Initiative is a critical issue to our Canada-Montana border crossings. Safe and secure borders are necessary but we must do this in a way so as to continue to facilitate legitimate cross-border travel and commerce. We appreciate that lower-cost alternative documents are being accepted at the borders and that a recently announced multi-million dollar public awareness campaign in both the U.S. and Canada will help explain the new travel document requirements.

H-2B VISA

- There are major Montana tourism partners that rely on international seasonal workers to fill temporary positions during peak travel periods. The H-2B program was created to allow short-term international workers to fill these temporary jobs capping participation at 66,000. There was a temporary exemption for workers that participated in the program in the past three years but this exemption expired on September 30, 2007. The caps are being reached way in advance which underscores the need to reform the H-2B process. Employing temporary international workers is crucial in order to provide necessary services to operate numerous Montana lodging properties during peak seasons. Without these workers, services, length of seasons and ultimately tourism revenue to the state would suffer greatly.

Transportation

Amtrak

- **Northern Route Reauthorization (S.294)**

The Passenger Rail Improvement Act (S.294) which has passed both the House and Senate and is currently in committee provides funding for Amtrak for 2007-2012. Amtrak is a valuable tourism partner to the northern tier of the state and the travel and tourism community appreciates Congress' continued support in funding this important travel resource.

- **Southern Route Feasibility Study**

S.294 includes an amendment to study the feasibility of reopening the North Coast Hiawatha Route, which would provide a southern Amtrak route for Montana. We support this first step in reestablishing train travel in southern Montana.

Air & Highway Travel

- Air service and highway funding are both crucial to tourism for Montana. With the changes in air service and the comparative lack of major carriers in Montana, air service costs are making it difficult to compete with other states for the tourism market. Also, as a result of declining revenue nationally from the motor fuel tax because of fewer miles driven and gas purchased, Montana is in an insecure position as one of the larger recipient states to the federal funding supplied by the national Highway Trust Fund. In Montana, this federal money accounts for 80% of our highway funding.
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